

BECOMING THRIVERS:
CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A RESOURCE
FOR RESTORING ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

A Professional Project
presented to
the Faculty of the
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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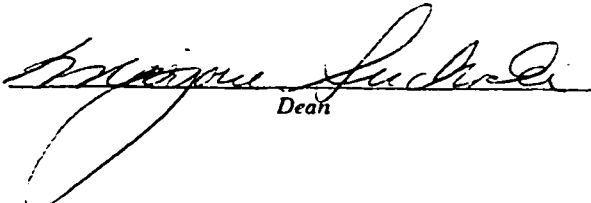
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ABSTRACT

Becoming Thrivers: Christian Faith as a Resource for Restoring Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Is it possible for individuals who have been victims of child sexual abuse to move to a stage of full recovery? Even those victims of abuse who become strong enough to call themselves survivors frequently continue to be controlled by that abuse as if it were an ongoing event.

This project explores the role of Christian faith as a resource to the victims of child sexual abuse for restoring their spirit to a stage of thriving which transcends mere surviving. This project includes devotional material to accompany persons on that journey from victims to "thrivers."

Chapter 1 presents the problem and defines terms used throughout the project. Chapter 2 examines the damage done to the spirit caused by child sexual abuse, using a case study of one family and the recent writings of others. Chapter 3 examines the current understanding of recovery from abuse and suggests that the understanding needs to be expanded to include the idea of fully restoring the spirit to new life. Chapter 4 examines the role of faith in recovery. Chapter 5 defines the thriver stage as a possible stage of recovery beyond survivor. Chapter 6 provides devotional resources for moving through the various emotions experienced in the journey to recovery.

In the same way that faith elevates persons to a higher level of existence, it also can offer the possibility of moving from a damaged spirit to a restored spirit for those adults who have suffered the pain of child sexual abuse. Through faith and the support of the faith community, the once abused victim can become a thriver.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Scope of the Problem

Over the last fourteen years, I have worked with a number of adults, both male and female, who were sexually abused as children. Their stories have been horrendous, their suffering enormous, and their losses extremely great. Many who call themselves victims continue to be victims. They may be unable to stop present and future abuse from happening to themselves because of feelings of helplessness and worthlessness. They are incapable of caring for themselves and are resigned to their lot in life. They are likely to become dependent on others and expect that because they are a victim, someone needs to rescue them the way they wish they could have been rescued when they were younger.

Some victims are unwilling to stop present and future abuse from happening to themselves because of feelings of guilt that they were responsible for the earlier abuse. They believe they should continue to be punished or even destroyed for what happened in the past. Or they may be unwilling to move from the victim mode because of an overwhelming fear of taking responsibility for what happens next to them. Or, in spite of the pain and suffering, they are unwilling to move on because the victim pattern is the only pattern they know and feel comfortable with.

Some persons are not even aware that they are continuing to play the victim. They assume that this is the

way life is to be for them. Some are locked in a childlike frame of reference and interact with people as if they were still a child. If the person is married, they relate to their spouse more as their parent than as a peer. A heavy burden is placed on the spouse to make decisions and keep them happy.

Some abused individuals call themselves survivors. Because of great courage, initiative and determination they are no longer victims, but survivors who have found a way to continue on with life. The pain, memories and sadness are still there, but they attempt to block it out or push it back into their memories and find creative ways of existing. Some of these survivors have done a lot of processing of their history, come to terms with it, and in so doing have released themselves of the stigma and pain. Many have even reached out to help others who have abuse in their pasts. Some of the survivors I have met are caring, compassionate persons. Often, however, they are unable to be caring and compassionate towards themselves. The pain within often keeps them from accepting or experiencing caring and compassion from others.

Some survivors are angry and attack anyone who "gets in their way," including other victims and survivors. They are angry with the world and all who are in it. They believe that in order to take care of themselves, they must be on the defensive so as not to be abused again. Some of them are in the process of learning to take care of themselves

and are ready to confront anyone who crosses their path. In the past, their boundaries were violated and now they maintain rigid boundaries to protect themselves. "Having escaped the role of victim, we want to guarantee we will never return to it, so painful has it been to us. And the only guarantee seems to be to cling ferociously to our power."¹ Such rigidness, however, serves only to keep them isolated and alone, rather than safe.

I am deeply saddened by the violence that has happened to incest victims and survivors. There is absolutely no justification for sexual abuse. It is an evil that must continue to be named as such and dealt with in a straight forward and clear way so as to discourage other individuals from committing the evil. Victims and survivors could then be relieved of the shame, guilt, and burden that they carry as a result of society looking the other way, minimizing the effects of abuse, or blaming the victim for the abuse.

My heart is heavy when victims and survivors see themselves as marked for life and carry the secret of sexual abuse for fear of what would happen to them if others knew. They continue to grieve for what they lost, and that loss overshadows the rest of their life. The power of the perpetrator lives on even if they are dead. The hope of happiness is stifled. "For years we have been caught up in

¹Maureen Brady, Beyond Survival (Center City, Mich.: Hazelden Educational Materials, 1992), 96.

being a victim, struggling repeatedly for survival, weighed heavily by the burden of our history and the drudgery of carrying it."²

During my years of relating to persons who experienced childhood sexual abuse, I have become increasingly frustrated with the labels of "victim" and "survivor." Such labels contribute to the feeling of being marked for life. I believe that there must be something more therapeutic than these labels and the meanings behind them if the possibility of a full and freeing life is to be regained for those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. I have seldom heard anyone use the word "recovered" or "recovering" when referring to their situation. Only occasionally have I come across references to recovering in the literature written for survivors, therapists and clergy. Are adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse doomed to a constant struggle whose greatest goal is mere survival? Is a person marked for life; their expectation for joy only minimal? Do the consequences of abuse ever really stop?

This project addresses the problem of how the meanings behind "victim" and "survivor" limit hope for recovery, and seeks to develop a third stage which acknowledges complete recovery as a possibility. The project will suggest Christian faith as a prime resource for bringing hope and healing

²Brady, 35.

for that recovery, and finally, will develop devotional materials to assist in that recovery.

Thesis

My thesis is that a person can find release from past childhood sexual abuse and, with Christian faith as a resource, move beyond being a victim and beyond being a survivor to becoming a thriver.

The message of healing, life and a new beginning are present throughout the Bible. God is a God who suffers with the one who suffers and feels the pain of the one who has been wounded. God is outraged toward the violator who has used, harmed or attempted to destroy another human being for their own satisfaction and perverted need. Through God's healing powers, one can be released from the past and find new life. "[God] lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; [God] set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."³ Once abused, one is not doomed to suffer for the rest of one's life. God offers hope and a way out of the mess. God offers resurrection. "Resurrection means the victory of the new state of things, the New Being born out of the death of the old."⁴ With God, nothing in one's past need control any longer. Abuse is not the end.

³Ps. 40:2.

⁴Paul Tillich, The New Being (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1955), 21.

If the church is going to stay true to the message of Jesus and bring light, hope and justice to victims and survivors, then it needs to take a hard look at the way it has interpreted scripture in the past. It must claim the spirit of the message that Jesus intended. The church has often been seen as a perpetrator that continues the violence rather than a messenger of love and hope who helps to bring healing. Instead of the church being a sanctuary for victims and survivors to find rest and relief, it has often been a threatening, judgmental place. The power of scripture to redeem and recreate is often reduced to meaningless words or transformed into words to manipulate or control the abused. God is then seen as one who judges or punishes the abused, or as one who remains an aloof and uncaring being.

Definitions of Terms

According to Webster's dictionary, the term "victim" means "someone or something killed, destroyed, injured, or otherwise harmed by, or suffering from, some act, condition, agency or circumstance."⁵ The term "survive" means "to outlive,"⁶ and the term "survivor" means "one who or that which exists after the death of another or others, or after some event or time."⁷ The term "thrive" means "to prosper;

⁵"Victim," Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.

⁶"Survive," Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.

⁷"Survivor," Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.

to be successful, especially as a result of industry, economy and good management. To grow; to increase in bulk or stature; to flourish."⁸

Throughout the past decade, there has been a lot of inconsistency in the use of the terms "victim" and "survivor." The term "victim" in earlier years of the discussion of sexual abuse referred to both the person who was experiencing ongoing abuse and to the person who had experienced abuse in the past. Ellen Bass says in the section of the preface written by her to Laura Davis' and her book The Courage to Heal, "I first heard that children were abused in 1974...there were no groups for survivors of child sexual abuse. The word 'survivor' was not yet in our vocabulary."⁹ In 1983 she published the book using the term "survivor" entitled, I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse.

In the late 1980s and to the present, the word survivor has been used more often to refer to someone who experienced abuse in the past and the term victim has been used for someone who is presently being abused. But even today, persons who have been sexually abused may use either word to

⁸"Thrive," Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.

⁹Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 17.

refer to themselves as Jane A. Keene does in her 1990 article, "By God Betrayed?" where she states, "I am an incest victim" to refer to her past experience as a fourteen-year-old at the hand of a priest.¹⁰

Another example is the book Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse by Lynn Heitritter and Jeanette Vought. They declare one of the intentions of their book is "to help victims understand some of the effects of their sexual abuse...and be encouraged to know that many victims have recovered...."¹¹ Yet others take offense at being called victims. Sue Blume in her book Secret Survivors comments, "To continue to call her a 'victim' is to insult her by overlooking the victory of her survival."¹²

In this project I will be referring to "victim" as one who is living a helpless and hopeless existence because of sexual abuse that happened to them in their childhood, and has taken on the identity of a victim which then allows continual abuse.

"Survivor" will be used in this project to refer to an adult who was sexually abused as a child but who has found a

¹⁰Jane A. Keene, "By God Betrayed?" Otherside, Jan.-Feb. 1990, 25.

¹¹Lynn Heitritter and Jeanette Vought, Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 7.

¹²E. Sue Blume, Secret Survivors (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1990), 20.

way in their present life, whether positively or negatively, to deal with the residue of violence done to their body, mind, and spirit.

"Thrriver" will be used in this project to refer to an adult who not only has come to terms with the past, but is experiencing healing and freedom from the past. The past is not forgotten, but no longer dominates the person's present or future life. The person is recovering or has recovered the created self from the damage of the violation.

I am suggesting in this project that the term thrriver be used to identify the third stage for one who, having been sexually abused as a child, has moved from victim to survivor to thrriver.

The words "thriving" and "thrriver" were first used by T. Thomas in his 1989 book entitled Men Surviving Incest.¹³ Other authors who use these terms are Christine Dinsmore in From Surviving to Thriving (1991),¹⁴ and Carolyn Holderread Heggen in Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches (1993),¹⁵ who makes a reference to the word "thriving." Some mention the word in passing such as Maxine Glaz and

¹³ T. Thomas, Men Surviving Incest: A Male Survivor Shares on the Process of Recovery (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Launch Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Christine Dinsmore, From Surviving to Thriving: Incest, Feminism, and Recovery (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Carolyn Holderread Heggen, Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993).

Jeanne Stevenson Moessner in Women in Travail and Transition (1991),¹⁶ and Steven Farmer in Adult Children of Abusive Parents (1989).¹⁷

Although the word has been previously used, no one has suggested it as a possibility for identifying one who has fully recovered from childhood sexual abuse. Dinsmore in From Surviving to Thriving implies it indirectly, but does not actually identify thriver as a third stage.

Work Previously Done in the Field

Much has been written about sexual abuse and incest over the last twenty years. Until recently, the main focus has been primarily on educating the public about its existence and what the consequences are for its victims. A part of that focus has also been helping individuals who have experienced childhood sexual abuse to understand what has happened to them and attempt to free them from their guilt and fears.

In the last decade, the emphasis has been on recovering from such abuse with the assistance of the helping professions. An example of this focus is Derek Jehu's book Beyond Sexual Abuse (1988).¹⁸ One of the first and most

¹⁶ Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, eds., Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Steven Farmer, Adult Children of Abusive Parents (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

¹⁸ Derek Jehu, Beyond Sexual Abuse: Therapy with Women Who Were Childhood Victims (Chichester, England: Wiley, 1988).

highly acclaimed books to explore the possibility of victims and survivors taking charge of their own recovery is The Courage to Heal by Bass and Davis (1988). The authors, one who is a therapist and the other who experienced childhood sexual abuse, suggest that recovery is possible and outline steps and resources which victims and survivors themselves could use to bring about recovery.

Three other books that have been particularly helpful to this project are Mike Lew's book Victims No Longer (1990),¹⁹ Christine Dinsmore's book From Surviving to Thriving (1991), and Christine A. Courtois' book Healing the Incest Wound (1992).²⁰

Several persons have explored the relationship of religion to the experience of childhood sexual abuse and the recovery from that experience and discovered that the rate of incidence of abuse within Christian families and the church is no different than in other parts of society.

And to make matters worse, the possibility of recovery from the abuse is greatly hindered in these families because of the use or abuse of religion to control the victims and survivors.

Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker of the Netherlands did a survey in the early 1980s of women who grew up within a

¹⁹ Mike Lew, Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse (New York: Perennial Library, 1990).

²⁰ Christine A. Courtois, Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).

Christian setting. The results were compiled in a book entitled Christianity and Incest which was translated into English in 1992.²¹ Marie Marshall Fortune did a revolutionary work entitled, Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin in 1983.²² Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn edited a book entitled Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique in 1989 which explores how Christianity contributes to abuse.²³

Also Stephen J. Rossetti edited a book with a chilling title Slayer of the Soul: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church (1990) which attempts to challenge the church acquiescence.²⁴ A more recent book is Heggen's Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches (1993). She points out, "Not surprisingly, research has found that women who were incestuously abused as children have a significantly higher rate of defection from their childhood religion than women who weren't abused (53%)." ²⁵ She states

²¹Annie Imbens, and Ineke Jonker, Christianity and Incest, trans. Patricia McVay (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

²²Marie M. Fortune, Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983).

²³Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1989).

²⁴Stephen J. Rossetti, ed., Slayer of the Soul: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990).

²⁵Heggen, 44.

that more profound damage is done to the spirit of a person from a religious home than to a person from a nonreligious home.

More recently, though, several books dealing with the healing of the spiritual dimensions of victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse have been published. A few of these are Joanne Ross Feldmeth and Midge Wallace Finley's book, We Weep for Ourselves and Our Children: A Christian Guide for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (1990),²⁶ Sandra M. Flaherty's book Woman, Why Do You Weep?: Spirituality for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (1992),²⁷ and Catherine J. Foote's book Survivor Prayers: Talking with God About Childhood Sexual Abuse (1994).²⁸ These books make the case that the spiritual dimension of an individual is also damaged by sexual abuse. Therefore, if one is to recover, one must pay attention to their spiritual side as well. These authors see faith in God as a resource for healing from childhood sexual abuse.

²⁶Joanne Ross Feldmeth, and Midge Wallace Finley, We Weep for Ourselves and Our Children: A Christian Guide for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

²⁷Sandra M. Flaherty, Woman, Why Do You Weep?: Spirituality for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

²⁸Catherine J. Foote, Survivor Prayers: Talking with God about Childhood Sexual Abuse (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project will briefly deal with the stages of victim and survivor and then develop a third stage, thriver, as an option for moving toward and accomplishing recovery. This project also examines the latest understandings of recovery and explores how Christian faith and the church could be a resource for full recovery, rather than as a resource that continues the violence and abuse. This project concludes with devotional materials to be used by those who are moving toward full recovery.

This project will not cover how reconciliation and restitution could play a role in recovery. Although these two elements are considered an important part of the Christian tradition, especially within denominations such as the Mennonites, the scope and size of this project cannot begin to adequately deal with these topics. There is a serious need for a project that focuses entirely on reconciliation and restitution because of the many abuses done by perpetrators, the church and victims and survivors themselves because of a lack of understanding of the meaning of reconciliation and restitution.

Chapter Outlines

The second chapter explores the range and depth of damage done to the adult who has experienced childhood sexual abuse by looking at the abuse experienced by four siblings at the hands of their father. Observations are

made about the impact the abuse had on each of these persons in their adult lives. This chapter also reviews the current understandings about the damage done to persons who have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

The third chapter reviews recent writings by therapists and theologians on recovery for adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and points out the need for expanding the possibility and hope for full recovery. The fourth chapter suggests faith as a viable resource for recovery rather than a hindrance to recovery as it is often seen by victims, survivors and therapists.

The fifth chapter pushes beyond the stages of victim and survivor to suggest a third stage called thriver which describes the stage of recovery. The sixth chapter then offers devotional resources for dealing with the different emotions and feelings one often experiences while moving along the path to recovery.

CHAPTER 2

Damage to the Spirit

A Case Study of Abuse in One Family

Beginning from the oldest to the youngest, Jennifer, Mary, Lydia and Dan were all abused by their father. The abuse was sexual for three of them, but for Mary the abuse was verbal. In the community, Roger, the father, was considered hard working, honest and willing to help anyone in need. At home, however, his anger created fear among the children. One moment he could be playful and the next angrily threatening the children if they did not "straighten up." His anger forced them to be guarded about what they said and did. He would often remind them that he was the head of the house. At times when he was unreasonable, the daughters would argue with him, but they were always aware of how far they could go without causing his wrath to spin out of control.

When the children were all in grade school, Roger injured his back on the job and was unable to work for a couple of years. The family went on welfare for part of that time, which was an embarrassment to him. He came to blame the system for his being on welfare. He felt others were trying to take his dignity away. Verbally, he was harder on the children during that time, but he was less physically abusive with them than when he finally was able to work again.

Their mother, Rachel, played the helpless role.

Whenever the children turned to her to intervene, she would display a very tired look on her face and shake her head or shrug her shoulders. She dealt with stress in the home by having a number of illnesses including severe migraine headaches. Out of respect for their mother not feeling well, the children tried not to bother her during an illness period.

When their father was gone, their mother would be very gentle and caring. She often read to the children or told them stories about when she was a little girl. Then there were times (usually after something happened the night before between the father and one of the children) that she would tell the children about how awful their father was treated by his family. The stories were sad ones which made the children feel sorry for him and want to be loyal to him, but it also added to their confusion to have feelings of fear, disgust, anger and sympathy for the same person.

Years later, when Rachel entered a nursing home facility, she confessed to Jennifer about being sexually abused by her own brothers and asked Jennifer to forgive her. Jennifer was uncomfortable with what she was hearing and barely acknowledged what her mother had said.

God and scripture were used to discipline and control the children's behavior. Roger would often remind them that children were to obey their parents, which also meant that they were not to question or challenge their father. He

would accuse Jennifer of lying if she attempted to remind him of something he had said or promised. He would say that God hated liars and would punish them. God was portrayed as someone who watched over a person and kept a record of their bad as well as good deeds. Phrases like "a good Christian wouldn't do that," or "what would people say if they knew you acted like that," or concerning family business, "you shouldn't tell tales out of school" were regularly used by both parents to control the children. Anything the father did not want the children to do, God did not either. He would even claim to have had a conversation with someone in town who commented on one of the children's behavior as a way of controlling them.

Jennifer has memories of being sexually abused by her father, but has blocked out most of the details of how much and what took place. She clearly remembers being awakened during the night and discovering her father standing by her bed in the nude. Sometimes he would hold his penis and breathe heavily. At other times, he would take her hand and place it on his penis and move it up and down. Once she remembers waking to find him laying on top of her back with his penis laying on her buttocks. He did not remain long and no words were ever spoken. Jennifer would pretend to be asleep, but act like she was about to wake up. When she did this, he would leave almost immediately. She has no clue of when this began, but she does remember one instance when she was between the ages of seven and ten. She woke up and

realized that her father was carrying her down the stairs. He laid Jennifer on her parents' bed. She saw him lay her underwear, which he had removed before carrying her down, beside the bed on the floor. He said nothing to her. She remembers being confused as to why he put her there. She knew that her mother was gone. The only time the children were allowed in their parents' bed was in the morning when, occasionally, all the children would run into their parent's bedroom and crawl under the covers to get warm. It had always been a fun and secure time until that night. She does not remember, but does not think anything else happened after he brought her down stairs.

Finally, when Jennifer was in high school, the family moved to a house where she had a lock on her bedroom door. She began to lock her door every night which infuriated her father. He would check the door soon after she had climbed into bed, then angrily yell at her for locking the door. In the argument that followed Jennifer would not mention the real reason that she locked the door, nor would he give any reason why she should not lock the door, except to tell her that she should not do so. He demanded that she obey him because he was her father. She would refuse to unlock the door and finally he would give up and walk away.

Eventually her father gave up on Jennifer completely and began to go into Mary and Lydia's room at night. Lydia once told Jennifer that their father was "coming into their room." Jennifer encouraged her to lock the door every

night. She did, but then their father began the pattern of checking the door just after everyone was in bed. When the door was locked, he would order Lydia to get up and unlock the door immediately or else. Out of fear, she would comply even though she and Mary would complain about having to do so. Jennifer would try to intervene by shouting at him from the safety of her room to leave them alone. He would lash out at her and tell her to "shut up and mind her own business." If Jennifer continued, he would silence her by making a move as if he were going to come after her.

All three of the females on different occasions would complain to their mother about "Dad coming into their room at night." She would just shrug her shoulders as if she did not know what to say or do.

Lydia's experience of abuse was similar to Jennifer's. The father would come and stand by her bed in the nude and then either use her hand on his penis or fondle himself. The heavy breathing frightened her so that she was afraid to say anything or even move.

Finally, in her junior year in high school, Lydia had a mental breakdown and was hospitalized. She told the hospital staff what was happening at home and was never again allowed to return home to live. From the hospital, she was placed in a Catholic home for girls. This kept her safe, but caused her to feel alone and isolated.

Mary did not experience sexual abuse. This was a mixed bag of relief and rejection for her. Instead, Mary took

much of her father's verbal abuse. Sometimes he would be angry and at other times he would be in a playful mood, but he was always abusive with her. When she was younger, she had a drooling problem which he would often use to make fun of her. When he was angry with her, he would say things like, "You are a slobbering idiot, no man will ever want you!" "You are a slowpoke!" "You are dumb!" This last statement was reinforced in Mary's mind when she was held back in the second grade. It did not matter that the reason given was because she was extremely shy and the teacher thought another year would help her come out of her shell. He even taunted Mary when she needed to get glasses while she was in the first grade. The fact that Mary's father had not sexually abused her like her siblings was proof that what her father said about "no man will ever want you" was true.

Once when Jennifer tried to intervene and get their father to stop teasing Mary, he picked Jennifer up and threw her across the room and told her never to talk to him like that again. This was the only time any of them can remember him actually becoming violent, although they felt the constant threat.

Eventually, the father stopped going into Mary and Lydia's room at night. Instead he would go into Dan's room in the middle of the night and stay there until morning. In the morning, he would announce that his back had hurt him so much that he had moved into Dan's bed to sleep because it

was a better bed. It was not long until he went to bed with Dan every night instead of waiting until the middle of the night.

On many occasions, Jennifer would angrily shout at her father to get out of Dan's bed and sleep with mom "like you are suppose to do." If he responded that Dan's bed was better for his back, she would tell him to switch beds, which would make him extremely angry at her. She often begged her mother to make dad move out of Dan's room, but the mother never responded to her pleading. Soon the father would threaten Jennifer and she would give up arguing. The brother remained completely silent. To the present, Dan remains the most silent about what happened to him.

Towards the end of their father's life, while he lay in a hospital intensive care unit, each of the children, now in their thirties, went in at the encouragement of Jennifer to see him and make their peace with him. Roger had not asked for this, but knowing that he was dying, asked each one to forgive him "for the things he had done in the past." For Jennifer and Mary, his final words brought some release. For Lydia, it brought out more anger. Dan gave no clue to anyone as to how he felt about the experience.

Observations

The consequences of being abused have affected Jennifer, Mary, Lydia and Dan in their adult life in many similar ways, and yet not all have responded to being abused

in the same way. Only one, Jennifer as an adult with small children of her own, ever attempted to directly confront her father about the past. But then it was in self defense and in the heat of an argument where he complained that she did not come to visit often enough or leave the children with them. He accused her of lying and not giving him the respect a father deserves, and that he was very hurt by her lies. After all, he had done his best to provide for his family. He insisted that if she would not stop lying, she did not need to come home anymore. Jennifer, in fact, had often thought of not ever going home again, but felt she could not abandon her mother and siblings to the father's tyrannical outbursts, which increased as his health deteriorated. She feared there could be some physical abuse if she were not present.

The siblings are very guarded about their past. As the females grew older, they confided in a few people about what happened, but only in vague terms. They do not use the words "sexual abuse." Dan has never talked about what his father did to him or even acknowledged what happened to him, but he does not deny that something did happen.

There are several reasons for their guardedness. One reason is that they fear what others will think of them and of being rejected for having such a past. They have learned to not trust anyone. The fact that there are many others who have experienced the same thing does not help either.

Public revelations such as the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas episode only reinforce their fear.

Another reason for their guardedness is their sadness about the kind of childhood they experienced. To talk about the past is to remember that past and relive the pain which they have shut away deep inside. It is easier to pretend in public that all was well in their family. It is also a part of their fantasizing that perhaps the abuse really did not take place and they are just a normal family after all.

All of the siblings are survivors in the sense that they have been able to function in everyday life, hold a job, and care for their basic physical needs. None of them consciously blames themselves for what happened. They know their father was wrong for doing what he did and that their mother was wrong for not protecting them from him.

Jennifer has been the most successful in freeing herself from the chains of the past. She refers to herself as a survivor. She has exhibited a determination to have a different life from her past. She moved away immediately after graduation from high school and went to college. She felt she would die inside if she stayed home and worked until she had enough money for college. She became a teacher/school counselor and has done well in her chosen career.

She reacted adversely to the theory that one becomes what one experienced growing up. She attempted to put as much distance between her and her family, physically and

mentally, by moving to another state to settle down. When it came to dating, she chose men who seemed to be different from her father. She struggled for awhile before she said yes to the man whom she later married and is still married to after 25 years. She set goals for herself and her family to insure distance between her childhood and present life. She was determined that there would be better communication within her present family. She was determined to protect her children from any kind of abuse and, at times, became overly protective. She also wanted her children to feel they had the support in their school work and extra curricular activities which she did not receive from her parents. She was concerned that their self esteem not be damaged by her.

Even though Jennifer has worked very hard to put the past behind her and improve her life, she has still suffered from the past. Early on, she had low self esteem and struggled to feel confident in her job. She was merciless on herself when she made a mistake. Over the years she has grown in her concept of herself. Her past has had a negative affect on her and her husband's sexual relationship. She has a fear of losing control. Vague memories of the past at times are triggered and cause her to either withdraw and wish she were dead or to make her very angry. At one point they entered counseling for a time.

She has been very jumpy. Someone coming up behind her would cause her to scream and move away. Her jumpiness

always seemed to be a joke to others and even to herself. In the last couple years, she has begun to realize that her jumpiness was due to memories of her father coming into her room. Facing that fact has helped her to relax more.

Jennifer carries a lot of guilt over what happened to her siblings. She was able to stop her abuse, but as she sees it, this caused him to abuse the others and she was unable to intervene. Lydia's nervous breakdown adds to her guilt, as does the fact that Jennifer has a good marriage and family, a good job, and a nice home.

Faith has been an important part in Jennifer's life. In spite of the way her father used God to discipline her and justify his behavior, she believed that God was a God of love and who did not approve of her father's behavior. She believed that God would protect her and that God had helped her to move away from her father. Jennifer frequently prays to God and talks of trusting God over anything and anyone on this earth. She regularly attends church and is very involved in church work. The church family has replaced her biological family.

Mary is now in her forties and, although a survivor of her past, remains for the most part a victim of that past. Her experience of verbal abuse is seen in her physical appearance and heard in her voice. She often appears as one who has been beaten down. She has a peculiar walk which consists of shuffling her feet, while holding both arms slightly bent and her body swaying back and forth. She

often speaks in broken sentences with pauses and the phrases "you know" and "do you know what I mean" sprinkled throughout. One can tell how she is feeling about herself simply by observing her walk. When things are going well for her and she is feeling more positive about herself, she walks more upright and with less of a bend in her arms and less of a shuffle.

Mary has extremely low self esteem and generally acts fearful that she will say or do something wrong. When talking to someone, she searches the face of that person to see if they are understanding and agreeing with her. If she senses that they are not, she quickly back tracks or looks down, shakes her head and says either "I don't know" or "you probably know better than me."

Mary describes herself in negative terms and is quick to name the things she cannot do. She allows herself to be used at work and remains one of the lowest paid employees even though she is a hard worker and has been there longer than anyone else. Only occasionally will she stand up for herself to get a belated raise. She has a tendency to be dependent on others, playing the helpless little girl role and expecting others to make decisions for her.

She is kind and generous to others. However, sales people who pretend to be very caring in return and say that they want to help her, have taken advantage of her naiveté. Even after repeated warnings, Mary still will take a sales person's word over others. She wants to believe that they

are telling her the truth because the words "I want to help you" sound so reassuring.

There have been times when she shows a strong and capable side, but she nearly always sabotages herself back into old habits of thinking and behaving.

Mary has had a history of poor relationships with males. She is always looking for that "knight in shining armor" to come and rescue her. She was in one abusive relationship that lasted for two years before the person was killed in a knife fight. Once he died, she began to talk about him being a wonderful man who said he loved her. Her friends, the stack of bills he left behind, the property he destroyed, and her poor credit due to his actions could not convince Mary otherwise. She is now in a relationship with an alcoholic who causes her financial problems because of his addiction for spending money.

Mary often says to Jennifer that she wishes she had what Jennifer has. Yet when encouraged to make changes that could better her situation, she gives many excuses for why she cannot, often parroting her father's abusive phrases from the past.

At two different times in her life she experienced bouts of depression. Once, she was given a mild antidepressant for a period of time. Otherwise she has been relatively healthy.

Mary describes God as a God who watches a person and records their bad deeds as well as their good deeds. Good

things do not happen to a person when God is not pleased with the way they are living their life. A "good" Christian goes to church regularly, is kind to others, works hard, is honest, does not have sex outside of marriage, doesn't live with a male without being married, and doesn't smoke or drink. She, therefore, feels guilty for not going to church, for living with a man, and for having sex without being married.

Mary does pray to God and believes that God has helped her a few times. She assumes that if God doesn't answer, it is because of her behavior and that she is no good. God has high standards which she will never meet.

Lydia is a survivor of her past, but has paid a heavy price. She has been married twice. The first husband left her after two years of marriage. She left the second husband when their child was three years old. She had been having an affair and decided she wanted to live with the man. She was pregnant when she moved in with him, but moved out soon after the baby was born because he was physically abusing her. She asked Jennifer to come and help her move out for the safety of her and her children. She was determined to not put up with the abuse then or ever again in her life.

Lydia has since decided to give up on men. She feels that men only use a woman and she does not want to be hurt again. One conscious way to protect herself from men has been to gain twenty pounds. She feels that this way she

will not attract unwanted attention from men. She believes that because of "what Dad did to me," she is unable to have good relationships with men. She doesn't trust them.

Lydia struggles to provide for herself and her children with the meager earnings from her hospital housekeeping job, and so far, has managed fairly well. The one spending area she indulges in is new and good quality clothes for her children. Dressing her children well is a symbolic act for her to break away from her past. It is a sign to herself and the world that she is taking care of her children.

Lydia is also a survivor in the sense that she is determined to take care of herself and her children. She prides herself for not being on welfare. Paying for things herself gives her a sense of control over her own life.

Because she is determined that her children will have a happier childhood than she had, Lydia has trouble disciplining them. She remembers her father as having been very strict and mean, and she does not want to become like her father. She has attempted to talk to her sisters about the past, but the others have been unwilling to go beyond admitting that something happened. Her experience in the hospital when she was a high school junior has made it easier for her to talk, but it has not helped her to let go of the past. It has been harder to let go of the anger and to allow her to care for her own inner personal needs. Her anger has kept her from taking the past out on herself healthwise or emotionally.

Lydia is indifferent to God. She believes in God, but doesn't see what that has to do with her life. She assumes that God cares for others, but not for her. Where was God when her father was abusing her? Where is God when she is struggling now? She sees God as being very distant and judgmental. Where was the church when her father was abusing her, when she was hospitalized or in the catholic school? She left the denomination she grew up in and became a Catholic when she married her first husband. Since then, she occasionally takes the children to Sunday School because she believes that they will learn some good values there. She wants them to be exposed to God partly out of fear of what God might do to her if she didn't and partly out of having a sense that it will be a good influence on the children.

Dan is also in his forties and, except for the fact that he is a survivor because of his ability to care for his physical needs, he is very much a victim of his past. He refuses to talk about what happened to him at all, even though others know the father slept in the same bed with him from about the age of 12 or 13 until he was a sophomore or junior in high school. Right after high school he moved into his own apartment a few miles from home and became a truck driver. He has had the same job with the same company ever since. He rarely visited his parents.

Dan is a quiet person and maintains a constant smile on his face when he is around other people. He is only

comfortable with light and almost silly talk. When asked about what he is thinking or how he is feeling, he will either give a superficial answer, shrug his shoulders and change the subject, or just become very quiet. When he does speak, it is with broken sentences and little eye contact.

He has almost no friends, either male or female. He has dated, but eventually the women will break it off. Once he thought he found the person he wanted to marry, but was hurt deeply in the way she broke off the engagement. Dan is a very lonely person and longs for a wife and family.

He has a kind and sensitive heart which has led to being taken advantage of, both at work and in other relationships. He mistakenly gave his credit card to one woman he was dating so that she could get her car fixed. She took off after charging the maximum on his card and causing him major financial problems. A few months later, she returned and asked him to take her back. He was able to say no to her which is unusual for him to say to anyone.

He is now working two jobs to pay off his debts, which isolates him even more from others socially. Working gives him a sense of security and pride. Security in knowing that he can take care of himself and pride in knowing that he is unlike his father who had a lot of unpaid bills.

Dan believes there is a God because that is what he was taught. God is someone who created the world, but now stands off to the side and watches. God expects people to be good and keeps track of people's sins and then punishes

them for their sins. He believes prayer is something people should do, but shrugs his head when asked if it has any meaning for him.

For a brief time, Dan attended a church to meet other persons his age, but soon stopped going. He felt the people weren't very friendly.

None of the siblings received support or much positive nurturing in their childhood. Because they didn't receive it, nor was it modeled for them, they have continued the pattern of not giving mutual support or nurturing to each other, even though they all long for it. When they are together, they will talk about how families should be, but no one knows how to initiate it within their group. They look forward to getting together and yet dread it. When they separate, they are relieved and yet sad.

Although the abuse stopped over twenty years ago, and the father has been dead for several years, the effects of the abuse live on in each one of them. The pain is buried deep, yet it permeates their images of themselves, their relationships, their work, their relationship with God, and their peace of mind.

Current Understandings about Aftereffects

The experience of being sexually abused as a child has a life-long impact on an individual, as demonstrated in the lives of Jennifer, Mary, Lydia and Dan. It affects the body, mind and spirit, but it has been only in the last twenty years or so that childhood sexual abuse has been

publicly acknowledged. The period of time up to that point is "referred to as the 'Age of Denial.' This phrase aptly described the lack of awareness of and the lack of treatment for victims of child molestation."¹ It has been only in the last few years that much has been written about the effects of childhood sexual abuse, with Ellen Bass and Laura Davis' book The Courage to Heal as one of the first to pioneer the way. "The therapeutic community now realizes that surviving sexual abuse is in many ways like surviving war. Survivors on both fronts may suffer from post Traumatic Stress Disorder."²

Childhood sexual abuse affects people in different ways depending on the age of the child, whether the perpetrator was a family member or a stranger, how long the abuse lasted, and how other adults to whom the child may have attempted to turn to for help responded. Whatever the level of effect on individuals, there is a basic effect on all persons who have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

"Incest robs children of their childhood, of their sexual selves of the basic ingredients for healthy relationships: intimacy, trust, boundaries, security, self-esteem."³ A

¹Mollie Brown, R.S.M., R.N., Ph.D., "From Victim to Survivor," in Slayer of the Soul: Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church, ed. Stephen J. Rossetti (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 84.

²Heggen, 26.

³Courtois, 21.

child is left confused and scared. The world no longer seems like a safe place to be. The happiness of an innocent child embracing life is replaced with the sadness of a battle-worn child suspicious of life. "All abuse leaves wounds: A child's sense of self is crushed, a soaring spirit is held down and hurt, a capacity to trust is taken away and replaced by shame and guilt.... These invisible wounds and scars reach a survivor's soul."⁴

As early pioneers, Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in their book The Courage to Heal talked about how the abuse of the past effects the present life of survivors. "It permeates everything: your sense of self, your intimate relationships, your sexuality, your parenting, your work life, even your sanity."⁵ They list questions for a person to evaluate the present damage done in the areas of self-esteem and personal power, feelings, body, intimacy, sexuality, children and parenting, and families of origin. The questions are fairly basic, simple, and focus on where the individual is now. This book was one of the first self-help books for survivors of childhood sexual abuse which provided persons the opportunity to have "someone to care and understand" without the threat and risk of rejection and judgment.

⁴Ecote, 7.

⁵Bass and Davis, 37.

Among many survivors there is intense fear of disclosing because of the possibility of that rejection and judgment, but also because disclosing to someone else causes the survivor to relive the horror, pain, guilt and sadness. Books like Bass and Davis' book and a book by Mike Lew entitled Victims No Longer (which in 1990 became the first book written for male survivors), give victims and survivors acceptance and hope that there might be the possibility of recovery.

Lew also believes that childhood sexual abuse permeates every aspect of a person's life. He includes a list of possible current effects upon the individual which was compiled from responses of male incest survivors. Lew hesitates to make lists of effects of abuse or describe an abusive family because of "the tendency of survivors to self-eliminate."⁶ If a survivor can in some way eliminate themselves from such lists and profiles, then they can decide that maybe the abuse did not really happen or it was not that bad. Denial eliminates the possibility of recovery and allows for the individual to continue to feel alienated from their own body, mind and spirit. Even with denial, there is deep within the soul a sadness that affects all of life.

⁶Lew, 14.

Sue E. Blume in her book, Secret Survivors: Uncovering Incest and Its Aftereffects in Women includes "The Incest Survivor's Aftereffects Checklist" which she first developed in 1985. Her checklist of thirty-four items is a stringent but realistic list that deals with the complete range of potential responses to childhood sexual abuse. It includes such items as "fear of being alone in the dark," "alienation from the body," "suicidal thoughts," "self-destructiveness," "eating disorders," and "multiple personality." Blume's book came out two years after Bass and Davis' book and Lew's book, but she had been working on the checklist for a number of years. Blume says, "My book unveils a consistent pattern of emotional and behavioral aftereffects, evidence that incest has more complex and far-reaching consequences than other works have recognized. I call this pattern Post-Incest Syndrome."⁷ She suggests this pattern not as a "new psychiatric diagnosis" or for therapists and others to use as a label, but only for understanding the full range of aftereffects and to correct some of the mislabeling abuse done to survivors.

Blume put into words what many therapists were beginning to realize: that a large number of their clients dealing with severe depression, multiple personalities, suicidal tendencies, post traumatic stress, and other

⁷Blume, vi.

disorders had a background of sexual abuse as a child. Obviously not all persons who were sexually abused as children develop these problems, but this discovery helped bring to light the seriousness and the ugliness of sexual abuse of children to the medical and mental health communities. It also opened up new possibilities for understanding and recovery.

Overarching consequences of childhood sexual abuse are the feeling of abandonment and the destruction of childhood innocence. The safest person for a child to be with should be a parent, but when the sexual abuse is done at the hand of that person, it leaves the child lost and confused. "The emotional abuse of being abandoned again and again, of having no reliable adult there to nurture and protect you, forced you to deal with your troubles on your own...."⁸ A child loses innocence by experiencing the horror that human beings can do to other human beings. This affects the child's ability to trust which becomes a life long problem.

Abused children tend to lose basic trust in several ways: first, that we are in control of our lives and can take care of ourselves; second that the world is a rational safe, and predictable place; third, that people are benevolent and trustworthy; and finally, that we have the ability to⁹ bring comfort and relief to ourselves when we feel bad.

⁸Farmer, 47.

⁹Phil E. Quinn, From Victim to Victory: Prescriptions from a Child Abuse Survivor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 108

The world becomes distorted, and the perceptions of the child's own self become skewed. The victim/survivor develops coping skills to deal with life. Some of those skills cover the abusive past by dealing with the surface of one's life, and some continue the abuse on themselves in other forms on into adult life. For some, "with the foundation for selfhood seriously damaged in childhood, the survivor can spend years erecting an imitation (often a magnificently convincing one) of an adult with an intact identity and self-esteem."¹⁰ For others "survival skills may include dissociation, hypervigilance, isolation and/or using sex as a negotiating tool. These survivor techniques are necessary to help the child-victim survive a pathological adult-child relationship."¹¹

One side effect of childhood sexual abuse that has received little attention until the very recent years is the damage done to the spiritual dimensions of the individual. "When you are a child, rejection, fear and constant humiliation take their toll emotionally and spiritually. When you become an adult, the effects of this emotional devastation are still with you."¹²

¹⁰Feldmeth and Finley, 14.

¹¹Dinsmore, 23.

¹²Farmer, 5.

The betrayal of adults who were suppose to protect leaves physical scars. When "a child's sense of self is crushed, a soaring spirit is held down and hurt, capacity to trust is taken away and replaced by shame and guilt....These invisible wounds and scars reach a survivor's soul."¹³ The well-being deep within one's soul clouds the vision that there can be anyone who can care about or help them. This clouding affects perceptions of God, especially when the perpetrator uses God and scriptures to place blame on the victim/survivor for what is happening, or to keep the child silent for fear of God's punishment, or to imply to the child that God gives full approval. "A distorted image of God, coupled with a distorted image of self, create barriers to experiencing God's presence in the healing process or [God's] love in other facets of life."¹⁴ Victims and survivors are often left with feelings of guilt and shame for what happened to them. It was their fault that it happened and their fault that it didn't stop. "The power of shame to undermine the victim's sense of self, her capacity to love and accept herself, and her capacity for genuinely giving and receiving love seriously erodes her capacity for religious belief and a healthy spirituality."¹⁵

¹³ Foote, 7.

¹⁴ Heitritter and Vought, 53.

¹⁵ Nancy J. Ramsay, "Sexual Abuse and Shame: The Travail of Recovery," in Women in Travail and Transition, eds. Maxine

The parent is to be the nurturer for the child. When the parent misinterprets with word and action what God is like, the child who has little experience and knowledge about life beyond the parent is left with the warped and harmful interpretations about God. "Many working in the field of mental health believe nothing in childhood can so profoundly hinder emotional and spiritual well-being as having been sexually abused by someone known and trusted."¹⁶ If one can't trust the person they can see, how can they trust someone they can't see? If their parent tells them that they love them, but abuse them, how can the child even begin to imagine God's love as being safe and different from their parent's love? God will either be seen as indifferent to their cries or just like their parents.

The phrase, "slayer of the soul" comes the closest to summing up the damage done to the child who has experienced sexual abuse. This phrase, used as the title of Stephen J. Rossetti's recent book focusing on childhood sexual abuse and the Catholic Church, is taken from a poem written by a child molester describing himself. But to use the word "slayer" speaks of death to the soul which means no hope of recovery from the experience unless one is open to entertaining the idea of the soul being resurrected from the

Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 113.

¹⁶Heggen , 27.

dead. Many persons believe that when a body dies the soul lives on. If a soul were to die, would anything be left of that human? Or would they be only a vegetable?

Sexual abuse as a child brings isolation from self, others and God. Isolation can be experienced as being dead. Living day to day can make one feel they are in a tunnel with no way open to the warmth of light and salvation. They may look fine on the outside, but their silent cries within can be deafening to them. The fear that someone will hear them and yet the fear that no one will hear them causes a struggle within that makes the soul weary.

CHAPTER 3

Recovery from Abuse

Current Understandings

Until there was acknowledgment that childhood sexual abuse existed and that it caused damage to the body, mind and spirit, there could be no such thing as recovery from the abuse. What was there to recover from if it did not exist? Sue Blume in her book Secret Survivors suggests that what often has been classified as normal behavior in women may really be the coping mechanisms of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. She calls it the Post-Incest Syndrome which includes

the passivity, the seductiveness, the inability to accept her body, the dependency, the sense of duty and resignation regarding men's sexual needs, the perpetual victimization, the compulsion to deaden her feelings, the life-long pattern of sacrifice, the sense of obligation. If incest is the heritage of so many women, then its pathology comes to be seen as normal.¹

In the past, society's inability to acknowledge that childhood sexual abuse existed or to understand its effects left a person either a victim or a survivor with no hope of achieving anything better. One was "damaged for life," but did not even know what was wrong. They did not know why they had such pain and sadness because there was no name for it.

They seem fine, with no physical signs of having been injured. They are ordinary people...yet they continue to feel anxious, depressed and lonely. They continue

¹Blume, 297.

to be trapped by their past, yet only vaguely aware that their present-day difficulties² are substantially related to their childhood history.

The resilience of the human spirit to cope with the severe trauma is evident in the way many are able to survive and function day to day.

In recent years, since the issue of childhood sexual abuse has come to the forefront and the aftereffects have been exposed, there has finally been discussion on the possibility of recovery. Bass and Davis' book The Courage to Heal was one of the first to broaden the idea of recovery--that it was the choice of the person who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and within their control to make it happen. It was and remains a refreshing ray of hope for individuals, for it says "the effects of child sexual abuse can be devastating, but they do not have to be permanent."³

Recovery is a person regaining their life. It is when a person is no longer a victim held hostage by their past as if it is really the present or no longer a survivor tense and weary from trying to hide or outrun their past. Recovery is when the perpetrator no longer has power over the person they abused. "She must recognize that she is more than her history. She needs to understand that she is

²Farmer, 4.

³Bass and Davis, 38.

the architect of her future. She is in charge now!"⁴

Recovery begins when a person says enough is enough. The person is ready to put energy into facing the past and all its pains head on so that eventually a full future may be claimed.

In examining recent literature on the subject, it is clear that everyone agrees that recovery is something that does not happen instantly or over night. Some say it is a journey which takes years and some say it is a lifelong journey. For some individuals healing from the abuse requires intense therapy.

Many feel that recovery is a spiral process where an individual comes to terms with a certain belief, behavior or feeling only to discover that one has to deal with it again. It is a spiral effect because this time the individual is not back at square one. The individual has gained some new resources and strength since the first experience of dealing with the abuse.

Most also agree that recovery involves several stages of healing. "Healing is a process of recovering a self that has not only been lost to consciousness, but also has been actually stunted in its developmental process by the crisis of sexual molestation. There is no skipping over those stages of development."⁵

⁴Dinsmore, 169.

⁵Feldmeth and Finley, 18.

Just as identifying the possible aftereffects of childhood sexual abuse has helped to validate the experience of victims and survivors, so has identifying the possible stages of recovery that one may encounter during the healing process. Identifying those stages gives the victim/survivor a map for finding their way through the intense pain and suffering toward healing.

No two lists of stages are alike, but there are common themes that run through all the lists that have been developed since 1988. The stages of recovery cannot begin though until the individual has decided that it is time to begin and has the willingness to do so. Once this decision is made, the individual has taken a most crucial and difficult step--that of admitting to having been sexually abused and accepting the memories as true. Most victims/survivors have either blocked out some of the past abuse or have minimized it as not being that bad. This theme of remembering is most painful, for it causes the individual to come face to face with the ugliness of the past and the reliving of the pain of that ugliness.

Another common theme is that of affirming what one had to do to survive to the present. This will be new for the individual who has experienced abuse, for it is normal for that individual to see themselves only in negative terms. Some resourcefulness had to be present or the person would

have been totally destroyed. Many who work with abused individuals are often amazed at how they survived. Mike Lew in his book Victims No Longer says, "I was equally moved by the courage, intelligence and creativity with which incest survivors negotiate their lives...."⁶ Christine Courtois in her book Healing the Incest Wound talks of the lack of "a description of the creative ways these women had devised as children and adults to cope with their experience and its aftermath. They were survivors in the truest sense of the word."⁷

Eventually as one progresses through the stages of recovery, one will want to sort through the tools and resources one used to cope and decide which ones should be laid aside now in order to recover, which ones should be strengthened more, and which ones now need to be developed to move on beyond mere coping and into healing.

Another common theme is grieving. One who was abused needs to grieve over what happened to them, often at the hands of one who was suppose to protect them. There is a need to grieve over what was lost in childhood. They were deprived of the joy of that innocence and of life. They were deprived of the security of knowing that someone was there to protect them. They were deprived of the nurturing

⁶Lew, 4.

⁷Courtois, xiv.

that encourages and supports a child and that allows them to go through the normal sequence of development. They were deprived of love and the right to positive self esteem.

There is also a need to grieve over how the abuse has colored one's adult world and caused continuous pain. There is a need to grieve over the constant haunting memories that have affected every aspect of the person's life and even at times continues to control a person's ability to live.

Finally, there is the need to grieve over what never was such as growing up in a "normal and happy" family. Jennifer talked of how she blocked out the pain of her abuse by fantasizing that her family was really like the pictures of the family in her first grade reader. Those pictures soothed her and gave her hope that things could be better some day. She experienced great pain the day she knew that she had to let go of those pictures and stop pretending that her family was like that and, instead, begin the process of looking at what her family was really like. Those pictures were the security blanket that protected her from experiencing her real feelings. Letting go of those pictures allowed the ugliness to come back into her memory.

Then there is the common theme of dealing with a wide range of perceptions and emotions. The most important perception to come to terms with is the false notion that they were responsible and to blame for what happened to them in the past. Facing the abuse of the past triggers fear, sadness--often to the point of depression for many--and

anger. Facing the memories of abuse can be a part of healing, but it can also cause one to get stuck in the past by having the need to tell everyone the whole story over and over again.

Another common theme is breaking the silence. Telling someone else who can be trusted is important in at least three ways. First, it helps the individual to name what happened to them and publicly declare that the perpetrator will no longer have an effect on, nor be protected by the individual. It is freeing because the individual does not have to work any more at keeping it a secret. The second way is that it opens up the possibility of being supported and loved as all human beings need to be, for that individual has invited someone in to care. And the third way is that it strengthens the individual to feel like they are in control of their own life. To feel in control is extremely important for healing to take place.

The final common theme is for the individual to accept responsibility for their own decisions from now on. To do this brings immense freedom. "We begin to give up seeing ourselves as victims, and we regain a sense of personal power and responsibility for our lives. We become more focused on our present lifestyle than on events of the past. We sense a new freedom and a world full of possibility."⁸

⁸Flaherty, 115.

The Need for a Broader Understanding

Until the Bass and Davis book came out in 1988, the emphasis in the discussion on childhood sexual abuse was on the devastation caused to the lives of those who had experienced abuse. There was a perception among many including victims and survivors that the experience of childhood sexual abuse marked the person for life as damaged goods. All the more reason for persons to keep their past secret or minimize what has happen to them in order to not risk rejection or judgment.

Although there are currently many books written on healing and recovery of childhood sexual abuse, some still reinforce the marked for life theme which can heighten the negative feelings within the individual dealing with abuse in their past or hamper the vision of what their future could be like. Even Christine Dinsmore's positive book entitled From Surviving to Thriving implies this theme when she says, "This is a book about being scarred for life but not damaged beyond repair."⁹ Dinsmore is a therapist who did not experience sexual abuse in her childhood. But even Maureen Brady, who did experience abuse, uses the image when she says, "Our incest wounds, too, can heal with scarring."¹⁰ From these two quotes one could understand

⁹Dinsmore, 1.

¹⁰Brady, 1.

that there is a kind of recovery, but that the individual will be scarred for life. Each explain the positive side to scarring. Dinsmore says, "scars are necessary for the healing process to begin. Scars must not be considered synonymous with hopelessness and an inability to recover but rather as signs that one has made it through a terrible ordeal."¹¹ Brady says, "Scar tissue has remarkable qualities. It is tough and not very pliant in the beginning. Then it softens remarkably with time. So too, does our psychic scar...."¹² Scar is probably the best image available because it does imply that healing has taken place, but the word scar evokes an image of ugliness and a feeling of marked. Scar also implies that healing took place in its own way and again the individual has very little control on what it will look like and where it will show. Scars are something that most people try to hide.

Writings on recovery also focus heavily on the idea that it can be a lifelong process or even lifelong struggle. "Recovery from the ravages of sexual abuse is a process--for many, a lifelong struggle to face and deal with emotional and spiritual repercussions."¹³ In response to a woman who was abused by her father, David Blumenthal in his book

¹¹Dinsmore, 31.

¹²Brady, 1.

¹³Heitritter and Vought, 243.

Facing the Abusing God says, "I think you expect too much from the word 'healing.' No one ever is healed wholly, at least not in matters of the heart. Psychological healing is not like medical healing; it is always partial. Life gets better; it never reaches the garden of Eden."¹⁴

While it may take a long time for many individuals to deal with the abuse and its aftereffects, could the words "lifelong" and "struggle" be a discouraging and hopeless sentence to some? The victim/survivor of the abuse is consciously or unconsciously aware of the sentence they have already lived out. Are there words to describe a new point of reference once a person has decided to move toward recovery? There has been movement from recognizing that childhood sexual abuse does exist, to recognizing that it has many aftereffects in a person's life, to recognizing that there is such a thing as recovery from the painful experience.

It is time for language to change to reflect that movement and to help lift the weight of the past. The words victim and survivor continue to label the person and identify them with their past. Victim conjures up images of persons to be pitied as hopeless and helpless in changing their situation. It also conjures up feelings within the person who has experienced childhood sexual abuse to see

¹⁴David R. Blumenthal, Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 209.

themselves as helpless and marked for life. The word survivor conjures up images of a person who has made it, but who knows in what condition, or a person who is struggling to hang on and enduring the aftermath. Although survivor can be a positive word that signifies strength, would anyone want to be a survivor for the rest of their life? Would anyone want to have their life experience summed up by the word survivor?

There is a need for another word besides victim or survivor to describe a person who is moving toward recovery or has recovered from the experience of abuse. It needs to be a word with a very strong and positive image that implies new life, happiness and health--a new stage in a person's life. It needs to be a word that would give hope that there can be life after abuse. And finally it needs to be a word that would mark a vision or goal for all victims and survivors to move towards a healthy life.

There needs to be a word which describes a new and final stage that inspires healing from the past and signifies that the individual is moving on with a new freedom and a joy that has never before been experienced by the individual. And along with that new and final stage, there needs to be a resource available to victims and survivors that acknowledges all the pain and horror they have experienced and gives back what was taken away and even more. A resource that makes the new and final stage possible. Determination can accomplish a lot by itself, but

resources added to determination can ease the burden and strengthen and encourage the individual to go the full distance to recovery without becoming so worn out and battle weary. Sometimes resources fill in and inspire determination to be born within a person.

CHAPTER 4

Faith as a Resource for Recovery

Traditional Claims of Faith as a Resource

Within the Christian tradition, there are many familiar words and phrases used to describe what the Bible says God has to offer to all humans. Some of those are love, peace, salvation, healing, rebirth, justice, resurrection, hope, new life and eternal life. Believing in God and accepting what God has to offer is seen as the answer to life's difficulties and tragedies. It is God who cares for the individual and provides the support needed to reclaim life and to be free from the power of evil. Faith in God is suppose to connect the individual to a power that surpasses all understanding so that the individual can begin to see a vision for something better in one's life. Faith is the force pulling a person toward something better. It strengthens and energizes even when the person feels weak and helpless and unable to go on. It builds hope where most people would say there is no hope and it opens up the door for a new beginning. People throughout history have spoken of faith as the resource for dealing with life. Yet if faith is truly a resource, then what stands in the way for many victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse to embrace that resource?

Hindrances to Experiencing Faith as a Resource

Ethics professor Dan D. Rhoades at the School of

Theology at Claremont once described the ideal church as a sanctuary "where heaven and earth meet, where everyday assumptions and rationalizations are broken open like the frail elements they are, in order to reveal a more inclusive, just, empowering and satisfying truth through the presence of the sacred."¹

This sounds good. In fact, wonderful. But often it is not the experience of many people, including the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Often times it can appear that the church has lost this understanding and become like any other institution. The church can look like a self-preserving institution when it remains silent on the issue of abuse, or when it ignores that abuse is happening within the church and within the families who attend. It can look like an uncaring institution when it does not give a voice to victims and survivors, or encourages the victims and survivors to forgive and forget. It can look like an institution siding with the powerful when it not only fails to confront the perpetrators, but actually seems to be supporting them. The church, which often speaks about God's love and justice, can discourage victims and survivors from experiencing that love and justice and from seeing Christian faith as a resource for recovery from abuse.

¹Dan D. Rhoades, "What is a Sanctuary Church?" sermon delivered at the Claremont United Methodist Church, Calif., 3 Feb. 1985, 1.

Because of the way the church has often responded or not responded to the issue of abuse, many victims and survivors experience it as oppressive and judgmental rather than as a place of refuge. When the church is experienced this way, it is generally assumed that God must be like this as well. Many victims and survivors blame God or at least believe that God did not care enough about them to step in and stop the abuse from happening. They believe that God may even have condoned such horrendous actions to punish them for being bad or to fulfill God's need for them to sacrifice their bodies.

Because of such failures, the church ends up being, not a signpost pointing the way to faith, but a roadblock barring the way. The victims and survivors are left to wander in the wilderness with no help for finding healing and hope.

An important book that sheds some light on the experiences and feelings of adult survivors of child sexual abuse toward God and the Church is Christianity and Incest written by Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker. The book is based on the findings of a study done in the Netherlands in 1982 by the authors who conducted interviews with women who had a religious upbringing and had been sexually abused as children. The findings were first published in 1984 in the Netherlands, then translated and published in the United States in 1993.

One conclusion from the study was that the women through their religious upbringing "were made easy prey to sexual abuse in the extended family. Moreover, their religious upbringing caused them problems in working through their experiences."²

"The offenders were decent, well-functioning adults in the community, sometimes with highly respected professions. With the exception of one, all of the women interviewed have turned their backs on the church. The majority of the offenders, however, are still involved in the church. Half of them still occupy an official church position."³

The sad and even discouraging reality is that the experiences of the women in regards to religion and childhood sexual abuse in 1982 is not that much different from the experiences of many women today. The evil that has been allowed to flourish continues to take place in the name of God and the church. Victims continue to be silenced by the church's implicit threats of shame and reprisal, or by the explicit denial that such a thing could happen. Women continue to be conditioned with the verbal abuse that characterizes them as evil, seductive, worth less than any male. They are coerced with interpretations of scripture

²Imbens and Jonker, 5.

³Imbens and Jonker, xvi.

that emphasize submission, obeying God's will, or God's punishment of a wrong doer.

Many times when the church does listen, the emphasis is often on the victim or survivor needing to forgive the offender and forget as God would have one do. Sometimes adult survivors experience a continuation of the abuse by ministers and priests who take advantage of them for their own needs under the guise of "showing them that sex can bring joy" as opposed to what they experienced through abuse. The supposed representative of God makes God seem even further away and uncaring. All trust in God and the church is shattered and the survivors are increasingly disillusioned.

Among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse common images of God include: God the Father, strict father, like a judge, someone to be afraid of, a punishing God, a big man, a ruler and a dominant being. God is threatening, revengeful, far away, demanding, knows all and could intervene but doesn't. God even sacrificed God's own son.

Survivors often believe God has expectations that must be met. They believe persons must love others more than themselves. They believe that they must obey their fathers, sacrifice themselves, forgive and forget. They believe that they are bad and so need to be punished by God. God blames them for the abuse that has happened because they didn't stop it. They feel guilty and condemned. These beliefs separate them from the very One who supposedly loves and cares for all creation especially the lowly.

Survivors often deal with feelings of guilt, confusion, doubt, disbelief, fear, loneliness, disgust, disappointment, sadness and emptiness. These feelings develop because one expects to be safe not abused in one's own family. Parents are suppose to protect and care for their children. Children are so trusting of their parents and so vulnerable to the world around them. When a parent betrays that trust and uses the child for their own pleasure, the child is confused and devastated. To be abused by the very one the child looked up to leaves the spirit and mind crushed!

As devastating as this experience is for a child in any family, it is compounded when that family identifies with the church. When the church talks of God's love for all creation and God's grace and mercy, and yet the parent who is considered a "good Christian" violates a child even using God and scripture to keep the child silent, then the child feels doubly alone and abandoned. Christine A. Courtois in her book Healing The Incest Wound says, "Many survivors balk at the idea of God or a higher power feeling as though they were long ago abandoned by a cruel and uncaring God."⁴

Violations done in the name of God, churches failing to speak out against the evil, or using scripture to silence the victim/survivor have kept many from taking faith seriously or from seeing the church as a resource for healing. Few books

⁴Courtois, 202.

dealing with survivors and healing give reference to faith and the church as resources, and if either are mentioned, it is often in a negative light. Courtois goes on to say, "The survivor can be helped to see that she need not turn to an organized religion or even believe in God in order to develop her spirituality."⁵

James Poling in his book The Abuse of Power says about the church,

In fact, a majority of girls and women and a significant percentage of boys are molested and raped in our culture. We are only beginning to uncover the astounding prevalence of this heinous crime....The silence of the church on sexual violence is remarkable when one begins to understand the depth of evil we are discovering. How can the church remain silent?⁶

Why does the church often remain silent? Why should the church speak out? What would the church look like if it truly were a place where heaven and earth met?

The Church's Challenge

When the church fails to be a sanctuary where heaven and earth meet, the result can be not only silence, but loss of focus. Instead of Christ being the center from which the church draws its energy and focus for caring, for life, and from which it draws a vision for the present and the future,

⁵Courtois, 202.

⁶James Newton Poling, The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem (Nashville: Abington Press, 1991), 146.

it looks to society for its cues. The church then becomes in the world and of the world, rather than in the world, but not of the world.

James Nelson says, "organized Christianity, however, is frequently distorted by a church-centered [pluralism]. Here God is subtly made a captive of the church and the church seeks its unity, holiness, and universality not in faithfulness to God, but as ends to be sought for the church's own sake."⁷ If this happens then the church looks no different than its surroundings. Instead of being a sanctuary from violence, it will contribute to the violence against God's creation. It will remain silent on such issues of childhood sexual abuse in order to preserve its comfortable existence. When the church, which is to represent God's presence and way in the world, doesn't respond to the evil, it then sins against God in two ways. It causes God to be blamed for the violence and evil in the world which discourages victims and survivors from turning to God. Secondly, it participates along with the perpetrator in causing harm to God's creation as well as pain to God.

If the Church is to be a place where heaven and earth meet, then it needs to shed its alliances with the world's way of viewing creation. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his book Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, deals with the

⁷James B. Nelson, Moral Nexus: Ethics of Christian Identity and Community (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 42.

church's need to make this shift. He stresses that when one looks through society's lenses and accepts its values as one's own, then anything can be justified as either all right or all wrong.

In describing radical monotheism, Niebuhr says,

the value-center is neither closed society nor the principle of such a society but the principle of being itself; its reference is to no one reality among the many but to One beyond all the many...as a faith, it is reliance on the source of all being for the significance of the self and of all that exists. It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued and because you are, you are beloved and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love.

With this view, the church would be able to see the evil wrapped up in abuse and to name it and to deal with it.

When the church is not able to separate itself from society's ways in order to have eyes to recognize evil and hearts to have courage to name evil, then it destroys hope for the victims, survivors and even for the perpetrators who believe they benefit greatly from the church keeping silent. When the church chooses not to see evil, or not to respond to what it knows is evil, then it is often seen by society as ineffectual in dealing with the issues that matter. Eventually it loses its ability and opportunity to give witness to Christ's way.

⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplemental Essays, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 32.

The church is called to be a witness to the world of Christ's nature and of the age to come. "The church is to be the continuation of Christ here on earth."⁹ It is to be the community where the Word becomes flesh and binds all people together into Christ. It is to make tangible the justice, righteousness, love and peace of the age to come. Letty Russell says, "Being not of the world requires a recognition that God's justice calls us to live now, as if we are part of the mended creation rather than participants in a broken one."¹⁰

To be a part of this "mended creation" requires the church to break silence about the violence of abuse. Just as Christ reached out to those suffering and in pain, so the church must reach out. If the church is to be faithful to Christ, it will give love, grace and compassion to the victims and survivors so that they might truly experience an exodus out of their binding past and move into a liberating present and future as God intended for all of creation to experience. If the church is to be faithful to Christ, it must be bold in naming the evil to which the perpetrators have given themselves over as a sin against God and God's creation. To do anything less is to participate in this sin

⁹Jurgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 72.

¹⁰Letty M. Russell, Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 125.

and doom all (victims, survivors, perpetrators and the church) to an oppressive and destructive life.

When the church is a place where heaven and earth meet, then evil is exposed and short lived rather than condoned as God ordained and passed on from generation to generation. Victims and survivors experience a refuge from abuse and are given a home full of God's liberating love. A love able to restore their spirits to wholeness. Perpetrators are no longer harbored or protected, but forced into the light and their sin against God's creation exposed, creating a sanctuary that offers perpetrators their only hope for new life as well.

If the church is to be faithful to Christ, then its words and deeds must match. Without this match there is no integrity. To claim that God is a God of love, then the church must hear the pain and suffering of victims and survivors. To claim that God is a God of justice, then the church must speak against the violence of abuse. To claim that God is a God of refuge, then the church must be a sanctuary where heaven and earth meet.

There are several tangible ways the church can demonstrate the idea of heaven and earth meeting and the church being a place of sanctuary. The church must speak out against such abuses in sermons and through the kind of programs it offers. This will give victims and survivors the feeling that they just might be believed and supported. The church should set up guidelines and procedures for dealing

with abuse situations. This will convey to the victims and survivors that they can get help and be safe. It will also convey to the perpetrators that what they are doing is wrong and cannot be justified in any way and that they can get help.

The church can provide support groups to help persons come to terms with the abuse in empowering ways. The church can offer financial assistance for counseling and other needs to help the victims and survivors rebuild their lives.

The church can offer educational opportunities for persons of all ages to grow in their understanding of sexuality, building healthy relationships, sexual abuse and other kinds of abuses including power abuse, and so on.

The church needs to come to terms with how leadership within is selected and how decisions are made if any of the above suggested ways are to truly have any effect. A church with all male leadership speaks volumes to why abuse exists among the membership and why females feel such a burden and so much pain and hopelessness.

And finally, the church needs to rethink how it interprets and uses scripture for scripture is meant to give life.

Reclaiming the Power of the Scriptures

When the church truly becomes a place where heaven and earth meet, then the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience a very different God indeed. It is a God of love and grace. A God who condemns the evil done to one of

God's own. The scriptures are no longer turned against the adult survivors but used to bring healing and life to the survivors. They are the cup of cold water offered in Christ's name, not the stone thrown in judgment!

The creation story is the first account to offer the cup of cold refreshing water to the adult survivors by pointing to the special place they have in creation before God. "So God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them."¹¹ The point is made twice in this one verse that God created the adult who is a victim and the adult who is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. They are to see themselves as in the image of God and no less! The abuse done to them does not change that fact.

Another cup of cold refreshing water offered to all victims and survivors is in Psalm 8 where the writer acknowledges God's intent for all humans.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established; what
are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals
that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little
lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.¹²

"Human beings" includes female and male versions of children, adults, and all races. God has made them all a little lower than God's own self and no lower; not even to another human,

¹¹Gen. 1:27.

¹²Ps. 8:3-5.

male or female. The persons who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have a special place in God's creation like anyone else which means they need not think of themselves as worthless, because God does not. Regardless of what someone has done or said to them, it does not change their special place in creation.

There are numerous scriptures warning those who abuse, violate, use or harm one of God's creatures in any way. The prophets speak volumes about what God will do to those who cause such atrocities. While this may seem harsh, it is important to note that God does not remain silent about abuse, but names it and will deal with it. God never condones the violence of abuse.

It is clear that when one of God's own is harmed, God has been violated too, for that individual is in the image of God! "Sexual violence is a sin against God because it is the violation of God's most sacred creation, a human being."¹³ God also shares in the suffering of victims and survivors. Jesus makes this point when Jesus says that when something has been done to "the least of these, it has been done to me."¹⁴ Not only does God suffer with the victims and survivors, but the whole church does. Paul says that the church is one body made up of many members and "if one member

¹³Fortune, 86-87

¹⁴Matt. 25: 41-46.

suffers, all suffer together...."¹⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki in her book The Fall to Violence says, "Through connectedness (of all of creation) every act of violence reverberates throughout the race."¹⁶ The victims and survivors are not alone, for God has experienced their pain and suffering.

So far only scriptures related to the specialness of God's creation have been mentioned. But what about the scripture "obey your father and mother" which has hung over many victims' heads as a God ordained commandment? In abusive homes, it is interpreted as the victim needing to submit to whatever is demanded; to obey at all costs to the self. The power of what happens to the victim lies completely in the hands of the parent who has interpreted this scripture to mean that the children are never to cross the parent, but to totally obey the parent's commands. The child is seen more as a piece of property to be possessed than as a human being to be cherished.

For many of the female survivors the negative interpretation of this commandment is carried into adulthood with other relationships, often with the backing of the church. Dorothee Soelle challenges this interpretation. "Obedience in the sense of maintaining an established order was not

¹⁵₁ Cor. 12:26a.

¹⁶Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994), 105.

sufficient for Jesus. He expected us to engage in changing the world--and it was to this end that he set free our phantasy."¹⁷ By phantasy she means freedom for new life. There is to be a new order not more of the same.

Jesus spoke on behalf of the children and blessed them saying "let the little children come to me, and do not stop them."¹⁸ Jesus made other positive references to the specialness of children. Jesus role modeled how parents are to treat children with respect, and love.

In Paul's writings, the scripture "children obey your parents" is followed with a warning to the fathers, "fathers do not provoke your children or they may lose heart."¹⁹

Finally, one of the most difficult issues that adult survivors have had to deal with is the belief that God demands sacrifice and submission or obedience from them and that is why they have been abused in the past. It is often based on the belief that Jesus was sacrificed at God's command.

Jesus came in human form to show the way through the maze of life and of the world's ways, and to show humans an alternative that would give new freedom. Dying was a

¹⁷Dorothee Soelle, Beyond Mere Obedience, trans. Lawrence W. Denef (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), 51.

¹⁸Matt. 19:13-15.

¹⁹Col. 3:21

consequence of the choice Jesus made to live a life with integrity. Jesus did not come to do away with pain and suffering. Pain and suffering are a part of living, but Jesus showed that they do not have to overcome a person. A person can rise above them and live on in eternity. Jesus did not come to do away with the evil and violence. Evil and violence are a part of living in this world, but they do not have to overcome a person. A person can rise above them and live victoriously. Jesus did not come to sacrifice himself. Jesus came to give life. But the comfortable, the self serving, the greedy, the evil fought back the only way they knew how through lethal violence.

The prophets were not telling us that Jesus had to be sacrificed for God's need, but that Jesus would be sacrificed because that is the only way evil knows how to deal with truth, righteousness and justice. Mary Grey in her book Redeeming The Dream says,

It was because of his life and values that Jesus was executed. His death is not to be seen as the wrath of God against a guilty world, for which Jesus was punished, but is interpreted as the culmination of the great refusal and blockage of the dynamic of mutuality in relation, which was the outstanding feature of the way Jesus related to the world.²⁰

When Jesus came, evil reared its ugly head and struck out and killed Jesus thinking that would end the new message and life Jesus brought to the world. Jesus cried out, "My

²⁰ Mary Grey, Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition (London: SPCK, 1989), 125.

God, my God why have you forsaken me?"²¹ In great pain and near death, Jesus felt abandoned. But God was there and God saw to it that it was not the end for Jesus. Evil lost. Christ's resurrection proved that those who killed him could not win. Jesus demonstrated that evil may take one's body, but it cannot have one's being, one's soul.

Jesus came to name the evil done and stand up to it. Jesus came to give courage, comfort, understanding and hope to the poor, the oppressed, and the violated. Jesus came to offer a way out of the maze and into a safe home.

The message from Christ to us is, yes I know that there is suffering, pain, injustice and evil around you. I experienced it first hand. I am with you when you experience it first hand. I remember and so suffer with you. But I am here to show you a way to overcome the horrors done to you. You do not have to be defeated. You do not have to die within, nor do you die if your body is murdered. For in the end we shall have the last word. We shall know victory and those who commit the horrors unless they repent in body, mind and soul, shall know the true horrors of their evil. They shall cry out as did the rich man who had ignored Lazarus' pain and suffering cried out from Hades for mercy but to no avail.²²

²¹Mark 15:34.

²²Luke 16:19-31.

Through Christ, the adult victims and survivors are invited to be transformed from being a victim or survivor into a new life where the past no longer has its hold and the spirit of the soul is finally set free.

Christ is not asking victims and survivors to just simply believe and everything will be okay and the pain will go away. Nor does Christ say that unless one believes, the abuse or the aftereffects of abuse will and should continue. Christ does understand the struggle and the pain. Faith is not believing in magic. Faith is pointing oneself to the possibilities of hope and healing. Faith is developing the attitude or desire for wanting something different. Faith is moving forward a little each day risking that each step will find some solid ground to stand on. Christ talked about only needing faith the size of a mustard seed in order to accomplish all things.²³ Faith that small can make a difference. Faith is a resource that can help one to reclaim their soul, mind and body.

²³Matt. 17:20

CHAPTER 5

The Stage of Recovery

Thriver

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves....groan inwardly as we wait for...the redemption of our bodies."¹ This is even more true for the person who has experienced childhood sexual abuse. Anyone who is imprisoned within their body, mind and spirit from that experience longs for deliverance from the bondage of memories, fears, anger and shame. They long to be released from the past and to know that there is hope for recovery. They long for a normal life where one does not have to be on guard all the time and where one can know full joy and freedom in life.

Christian faith speaks of such hope for recovery. It speaks of freedom from the bondage of the past. Faith believes in the possibility of full recovery of mind and spirit. This is evident in the story of Mary coming to put oil on Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. From the story, it is not clear how great her pain was or how much she had suffered. The Pharisee's reaction to her is a clue

¹James B. Nelson, Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 182.

that she was suffering greatly for he saw a condemned woman who should be avoided because of her past. She was desperate enough to interrupt a private dinner to get to Jesus! Jesus challenged the Pharisee's narrow and limited thinking. Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."²

Another example of faith's understanding of recovery is in the story of the woman suffering with hemorrhages for twelve years who came and touched the hem of Jesus' coat. Again no one knows the level of her pain and suffering, except to know that it lasted for twelve years and that she would have been considered unclean in everyone's eyes which would have impacted every aspect of her life in a major way. She was desperate enough to be oblivious to what others thought and risked much to come to Jesus. Jesus turns to her and says, "Take heart daughter; your faith has made you well."³

The response Jesus gave each of the women implied complete healing. Jesus did not say that from now on things would be better for them. Jesus also did not tell them to hang in there for they would make it eventually. These

²Luke 7:50.

³Matt. 9:22.

responses would only have affirmed their survival capabilities. Jesus did not pity them which would have kept them as victims of their past. Instead, Jesus used the words saved and well which imply a new beginning. Things would not be the same for them any more. The past had lost its hold on them.

Jesus also acknowledged the women's major role in making the difference with the phrase "your faith." They were not helpless persons even though they may have felt like it most of the time. They wanted a difference in their lives and they believed a difference was possible for them.

They took the initiative to make a change and Jesus strongly affirmed them for that initiative. It was through their efforts that started the chain reaction to recovery.

Time and again, while others judged persons by their past, Jesus was able to see beyond their past and into their heart and soul. Therefore Jesus played a part of the healing that those who came to Jesus longed to have happen within their lives. Jesus treated persons with respect and allowed them control over their own lives. To say that it was their faith that made them well meant that they had a choice and control over that choice. A part of their recovery was Jesus' support, understanding and caring.

Faith can bring about healing and fully restore a person. Faith helps individuals to be able to transcend their

situation and open up new possibilities. Faith restores life to those who feel dead. Faith strengthens those who feel like they cannot take another step. Faith empowers those who have been trampled down. Faith gives rest when one is weary. Faith gives peace to a tormented soul. Faith moves the individual from being a victim to being a survivor to being a thriver.

Thriver aptly describes the new and final stage that a person reaches in the healing process through faith. It gives a positive image of a person who is flourishing and embracing life rather than fearing it. It signifies healing. "Thriving means more than just an alleviation of symptoms, more than band-aids, more than functioning adequately. Thriving means enjoying a feeling of wholeness, satisfaction in your life and work, genuine love and trust in your relationships, pleasure in your body"⁴

While the word thriver has not been officially designated as the word to describe a movement beyond being a victim or survivor toward recovery, the word and its variations are floating throughout the most recent literature. Mainly persons who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and a few mental health professionals are recognizing that victim and survivor are not adequate to

⁴Bass and Davis, 24.

describe the person who has recovered from the past. Mike Lew in his book Victims No Longer comes very close to suggesting this term when he says, "The recovery process is one of learning...to thrive instead of merely survive. But, for now, 'survivor' is the best word we have....But we must always be aware that survival is a temporary state, one that will be replaced by something better."⁵ Linda T. Sanford in her book Strong at the Broken Places suggests that there are some pieces missing that keep us from changing the language when she says, "If we are to learn more about the possibilities of transformation, we must open our hearts and minds. Perhaps someday we will learn enough to improve our language to the extent that it will reflect the hope and health that 'survival' alone does not capture."⁶

Christine Dinsmore in her book From Surviving to Thriving suggests this new word when she states that "the goal is to go from survivor to thriver."⁷ But later on in her book it is clear that she has not picked up on her suggestion when she says, "There is something beyond...called the

⁵Lew, 7.

⁶Linda T. Sanford, Strong at the Broken Places: Overcoming the Trauma of Childhood Abuse (New York: Avon Books, 1990), xviii.

⁷Dinsmore, 38.

'integration stage,' the 'moving-on stage,' the 'going beyond stage.' This is...perhaps the final stage of healing, in which the survivor recognizes that being an incest survivor is only one piece of her."⁸ She again indirectly suggests the same new word when she talks about the person who comes to terms with her past only when "she has mastered the difficult journey from victim to survivor to thriver."⁹ In Dinsmore's conclusion to her book, she mentions the word thriving indirectly twice, but never directly suggests the word thriver as the final stage.

The word thriver is a strongly positive word that expresses strength, healing and new life. A thriver has control of their life again. They are no longer defined or dominated by their past. They are their own person who can feel, love and be happy freely. Being a thriver does not mean that life has now become all rosy, or that the individual is always on top of everything, but that the individual is gaining or has the strength, motivation and the desire to take hold of whatever comes and deal with it in a positive way that takes care of oneself and does not hurt others. A thriver believes that they have self worth

⁸Dinsmore, 45.

⁹Dinsmore, 46.

and something of value to offer others whether they always feel that way. A thriver has a vision for what they want their life to mean now and what it is to be in the future. This vision is what drives them in the day to day routine.

The possibility of becoming something more than a victim or a survivor can give hope to the one who has experienced childhood sexual abuse. "It is difficult to move out of the structures of the past unless we have a vision of what we are moving on to...."¹⁰ The word thriver signifies that the person has recovered from the shock of the trauma of the abuse and is moving toward complete healing from the wounds caused by it.

Calling the final stage of recovery "thrivers" signifies that a person is moving through the stages of recovery and toward complete healing. Healing in the sense that one is "living the rest of...life feeling like a whole person. Not just coping, not just getting by, not trying to pass for okay; but feeling, deep down...okay, feeling comfortable with herself and her life."¹¹

Thrivers speak of complete healing, not partial or patchwork healing. "This idea of health as repair work is

¹⁰Brady, 3.

¹¹Ellen Bass, forward to Victims No Longer, by Mike Lew, xxii.

shallow compared to Jesus' idea of healing as wholeness."¹²

Through healing, the body, mind and spirit are given new life and air to breathe in deeply. The individual is reconnected with God and the universe. It is a healing spiritually which is "a passion for life, a feeling of connections, of being a part of the life around you."¹³ Thriver speaks of hope and new and life-giving possibilities.

Clues to Thriving

The following is a list of some clues that an individual is on the journey to recovery and now is a thriver. A clue gives a hint of the picture that is developing. One does not have to be able to say yes to all the clues or to be able to say yes to any particular one in the fullest sense, but one is moving in the direction of saying yes to each one claiming more and more to be a part of one's recovery. That is the most important thing, that one is moving in the direction. There is grace for oneself in not having to be perfect and accomplish them all completely or all at once, but to see oneself as on an

¹²Priscilla L. Denhan, "Life-Styles: A Culture in Transition," in Women in Travail & Transition: A New Pastoral Care, eds. Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 178.

¹³Bass and Davis, 156.

exciting journey. No one leads a perfect life, even without the experience of childhood sexual abuse in their past. Everyone is on a journey and there must be clues or guideposts to map out the journey. A person who can claim even one small piece of one of these clues is a thriver who has the hope of continuing to get stronger and someday being healed!

1. My past no longer defines me. My decisions are not affected by my past except in positive ways. I do not take my past out on others. My past is only one part of who I am, but it does not limit who I am.

2. I recognize that I have survived and claim the resources I used to survive. Now I am ready to let go of any techniques that are no longer helpful to me and develop other resources within myself to build up my life. When I do feel overwhelmed with the past, I remember how far I have come.

3. I have let go of my feelings toward the perpetrator. I may still feel anger, but I no longer spend my precious time thinking about the perpetrator, being afraid of the perpetrator, wishing for revenge against the perpetrator, or expecting the perpetrator to ever ask for my forgiveness. If the perpetrator still has the potential to harm someone else, I will do what I can to stop the

perpetrator. Otherwise I may or may not confront the perpetrator. My recovery does not depend on confronting.

I have decided that the perpetrator will no longer have control over my life. If the perpetrator were to ask for forgiveness and it was clear from the perpetrator's actions that there was remorse and willingness to get professional help in coming to terms with the evil the perpetrator did, then I could forgive.

4. I am able to claim a sense of self worth. I take care of myself and do not abuse myself. I forgive myself when I make a mistake. I can identify many good qualities about myself. I do not decide my self worth by how others treat me or by what they say to me or by how I am feeling on a certain day. I have self worth because I am made in the image of God and am loved by God.

5. I no longer feel a need to constantly talk about my past with everyone nor do I have a need to hide or deny my past. When the topic comes up, I am willing to share if it helps the discussion, but do not have a need to if there are plenty of others to share.

6. I no longer use my past to excuse myself from responsibility or to put unreasonable demands on others to make up for what happened to me in the past. I carry my own weight. I also realize that others may have a painful past,

but for other reasons than having been sexually abused. I do not have a corner on pain.

7. I have forgiven myself for being sexually abused as a child. I now realize that it was not my fault and that I had no control over what happened. I release the shame I have carried knowing that the shame really belongs to the perpetrator whether they accept it or not (and usually they do not)! I am able to let go of the thoughts that blame me such as "if only I would have," or "I should have."

8. I trust my own perceptions. I know what I like and what I do not like. I know what feels good and does not feel good. My feelings match what is going on in my life. I am not afraid of being wrong. I do not spend so much energy second guessing myself nor do I allow anyone to belittle or deny my perceptions. I am able to make decisions based on my perceptions and can live with the consequences of those decisions.

9. I realize that I have choices. I can decide things for myself. I can say no when I want and I can say yes when I want.

10. I do not accept all things as they are, but will take initiative to change that which needs to be changed.

11. I am not as sensitive to images, memories, smells and touches as I once was. I can identify the times I am reacting to these things and then chose to not react. These

things do not have to control my behavior and my feelings in a negative way any longer.

12. I am not afraid of intimacy. I can allow others to love me in appropriate ways and at appropriate times. I can love others in appropriate ways and at appropriate times also. I am not a needy person who craves intimacy and expects everyone I meet to fulfill that need. I can form healthy and loving relationships.

13. I am able to trust, not naively but wisely, myself, others and God. Someone breaking my trust doesn't throw me into a reactionary mode. I do not now mistrust everyone, because of the action of one person.

14. I can care for others in healthy ways without sacrificing my own personhood. I can decide when and how I will care for others and who I will care for.

15. I am connected to a caring community. It is a community in which I can give and receive support. It is a community in which I can grow and change. It is a community which thrives on love and grace, versus self righteousness and judgment. I am becoming wise enough to know though that the community is made up of human beings who will not be perfect just as I cannot be perfect.

16. I am building up positive memories that will add a positive side to my past. My experience with childhood sexual abuse and its aftereffects are no longer the focal

point of the sum total of my past. I have things to remember that make me smile and laugh. I have images, smells and touches that warm my heart. I have stories to share with others.

17. I have a sense of a future. I am excited about the possibilities for the future. I see my future as bright and not doomed. I no longer look back to my past to determine the future.

18. I have a sense of peace within my soul. God's peace that transcends my past, my worries about the present and my fears about the future.

CHAPTER 6

Devotional Resources

The hope for this devotional material is to give voice to the range of emotions, pain and experiences of the victims, survivors, and thrivers of childhood sexual abuse.

Many of the victims and the survivors have not been able to find comfort, safety or hope within the Christian faith because they have been abused by "very religious" persons, perhaps even church leaders, or by persons who used scripture and God to justify their actions, or to manipulate the child into keeping silent or to curse and crush the child.

In a sense, the devotional material is presented as an attempt to reclaim the true purpose of scripture given to humans. The scriptures were intended to inspire, give hope, challenge, build up and instruct. For persons to use scripture to justify abuse, to control another, to belittle another or to block another from experiencing life as a gift from God is evil.

Scripture speaks of deepest pain, despair, raging anger, loneliness, and abandonment. It also speaks of refuge, overcoming, freedom, support, love, victory and rebirth. It is to be a resource for humans to find their way in this world.

The devotional material that follows focuses on various feelings and emotions that a person who is recovering from childhood sexual abuse will experience throughout their journey. Each section includes scripture, comments about a particular feeling or emotion, and a prayer.

Anger

Scripture

A Prayer for Vengeance

Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?
 Do you judge people fairly?
 No in your hearts you devise wrongs;
 your hands deal out violence on earth.
 The wicked go astray from the womb;
 they err from their birth, speaking lies.
 They have venom like the venom of a serpent,
 like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
 so that it does not hear the voice of charmers
 or of the cunning enchanter.
 O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
 tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
 Let them vanish like water that runs away;
 like grass let them be trodden down and wither.
 Let them be like the snail that dissolves into
 slime;
 like the untimely birth that never sees the sun.
 Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns,
 whether green or ablaze, may God sweep them
 away!
 The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance
 done; they will bathe their feet in the blood
 of the wicked.
 People will say, "Surely there is a reward for the
 righteous; surely there is a God who judges on
 earth."

Ps. 58

Jesus' Anger

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them,

"It is written, my house shall be called a house
of prayer; but you are making it a den of robbers."
Matt. 21:12-13

Comment

It is normal to be angry about what has happened to you. It is normal to feel deep rage within you. After all a horrendous act has been committed against you. Your anger is justified. Just as Jesus experienced justified anger and expressed it, so you have a right to express it.

Sometimes persons have been made to feel that it is wrong to be angry or that one should not let the sun set on their anger. Some persons are so angry, that they do not care what others say or feel, they are going to express their anger. In their efforts to take their stand and protect themselves from such evil happening again, they end up living their life in anger. Others fear crossing them in any way or the anger could be turned on them.

Allowing yourself to feel the anger and to express it is good. Your anger can give you strength to choose a new life for yourself. Your anger can give you the courage to redefine who you are and want to be.

How you deal with your anger will determine whether you are ever going to be free from your past. If you take the anger out on yourself attempting consciously or unconsciously to destroy yourself, you are allowing the perpetrator to have power over you. You are allowing the

perpetrator to continue to abuse you. If you were to succeed in destroying yourself, then the perpetrator would win.

If you take out your anger on everyone you meet, then you are continuing the cycle of abuse that the perpetrator has started. You are no better than your perpetrator.

Anger must come out. Your lungs, heart, mind and body need to release it. You can choose though how it is to be released. You can choose how it is going to affect you and others. You choose--is it going to be death or life?

Prayer

God, I have rage within my body that I need to spew out. Righteous anger for the great injustice and horrible violence that was done to me by someone who was suppose to care for me. Because of their sickness, I have had to endure enormous pain and suffering. I feel cheated out of good memories of having a normal childhood.

God help me not to be swallowed up by my anger and rage. Keep me from taking it out on myself and on others. May I have the strength and courage to stop the violence. May I instead use the energy of my rage and anger to choose a new life for myself. Amen

Loneliness

Scripture

My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for [God] will pluck my feet out of the net.
Turn to me and be gracious to me,

for I am lonely and afflicted.
 Relieve the troubles of my heart
 and bring me out of my distress.
 Consider my affliction and my trouble....

 O guard my life and deliver me;
 do not let me be put to shame,
 for I take refuge in you.
 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
 for I wait for you.

Ps. 25:15-18a, 20, 21

"And remember, I am with you always,
 to the end of the age."

Matt. 28:20b

Comment

When you have been abused, you can feel isolated. Maybe the perpetrator threatened and manipulated you from telling anyone what was happening. Maybe you are afraid to tell anyone for fear of what they might think about you. Maybe you are afraid that no one will believe you. Maybe you just don't want to remember.

You will feel alone when you carry the secret of abuse.

Secrets become barriers between you and others as you are on guard always to hide your past. Sharing with another makes the load on your shoulders lighter. It reduces the impact of the load on your life in the future.

Maybe you have shared with your family and/or close friends and they have pulled away from you. Loneliness caused by the rejection of family and friends causes immense pain.

God has not rejected you. God feels your loneliness and reminds you that God is with you always.

Prayer

God I ache deep inside for someone to hold me and care for me like I should have had when I was little. Someone to tell me that I am loved. Someone to trust with my past. Someone who would never desert me no matter what they knew about me.

God I'm told you are that someone. At times I believe it and at times I am unable to believe that it is true. God come and hold me. Take the ache away and soothe my mind. Help me to sense your presence and lift my head so that I know I will never be alone again. Amen

Self Worth

Scripture

So God created humankind in [God's] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them.

Gen. 1:27

O Lord, our Sovereign,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.

 When I look at your heavens, the work of your
 fingers, the moon and the stars that you have
 established;
 what are human beings that you are mindful of
 them, mortals that you care for them?
 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
 and crowned them with glory and honor.
 You have given them dominion over the works of
 your hands;
 you have put all things under their feet,

 O Lord, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Ps. 8:1, 3-6, 9

Comment

Self worth gets heavily damaged by abuse. It is damaged by what the perpetrator has done and said to you. Often a perpetrator uses derogatory language to humiliate and control their victim. Self worth is also damaged because you may blame yourself for being abused and decide that you deserved what happened to you. Because your perpetrator did not have respect for you, you may be convinced that you are worthless. The more you buy into the idea that you are worthless, the more likely that you have set yourself up for other experiences of being disregarded by others.

God has a different view of you than you have yourself.

God created you in God's own image. No matter what has been done to you, no one can change that fact. No matter what you feel guilty about, you can not change that fact. God sees beyond what anyone even you can see and looks on the beauty of your soul. The part of you that no one can touch but you and God. God holds your soul with love and gentleness. No one can take that away from you. No matter what has been done to you in the past nor what will happen in the future, you are in the image of God.

Prayer

God, many times I feel like nothing. Everyone else seems so sure of themselves. They seem so capable. Yet I feel so inadequate. At times I even hate myself. I do not understand why I do the things I do. I cannot seem to get it right. When someone criticizes me, I feel humiliated and stupid. Sometimes I even think that if I were not like I am that the abuse would have never ever happened to me.

God I am good at tearing myself down. I convince myself that I am really not good at anything and have this fear that soon others will know that too.

God, I want to believe that I am someone of worth. I want to have confidence in who I am and what I can do. I want to have myself back the way you intended me to be when you created me. I want to be able to feel good about myself even when I make a mistake. I want to be able to love myself enough so that I can allow others to love me. Help me God. Amen

Abandonment

Scripture

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from
the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you
do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
.....
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!
Ps. 22:1,2 and 20

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 he leads me beside still waters;
 he restores my soul.
 He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 I fear no evil; for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff--they comfort me.
 You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
 my whole life long.

Ps. 23

Comment

There is a feeling that goes beyond feeling alone. It is a feeling that you have been purposely deserted. It is like watching your family or friends get into a car and drive away knowing that they know they were leaving you behind and not caring for one moment. You cry and they laugh.

Having experienced abuse at the hands of a family member who was suppose to love you and protect you, but instead did the opposite leaves a hollow empty feeling inside. You feel that if you reach your hand out to anyone, they will only walk way. And maybe you did reach out to your family and shared what happened to you. Instead of receiving love and support, your family is rejecting you for lying and causing problems for them.

You wonder where is God? Does anyone really love you?
 Does anyone care that you exist? Will others someday just

get into a car and drive away leaving you standing in the middle of nowhere?

Feelings of abandonment can swell up in side. When they do, you feel lonely and deep sadness and even anger at times. When you feel abandoned, it is easy to pull away from even the people that do care about you. You can make it hard for others to reach out to you.

God is present, though, whether you feel God near or not. God suffers when you suffer. God is here present with you now. God will never leave you.

Prayer

O God, I feel a loneliness deep inside me. I feel hollow inside. I need reassurance that I am not abandoned.

Help me to feel your presence. Hold me in your loving arms and never let me go. Fill the void deep within me. Help me not to abandon myself. Help me not to retreat from those who do love me and have been supportive of me. Amen

Fear

Scripture

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
 who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
 will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress;
 my God, in whom I trust.'
 [God] will cover you with [God's] pinions,
 and under [God's] wings you will find refuge;...
 You will not fear the terror of the night,
 or the arrow that flies by day,

 Those who love me, I will deliver;
 I will protect those who know my name.
 When they call to me, I will answer them;

I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.

Ps. 91:1, 2, 4, 5, 14, 15

But now thus says the Lord,
[God] who created you, O Jacob,
[God] who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

Isa. 43:1, 2

Comment

Fear can eat away at your soul. The fear of nightmares haunts the night. The fear that there may be more that has been buried deep in the unconscious and will creep into the conscious. The fear that you will be rejected by others if they knew your past. The fear that you might lose control and never be able to regain it again.

Fear can hinder you from reaching out to others. It makes you not trust anyone. Fear alters your perspective about yourself, others and the world. Fear reduces your ability to move away from the past and have a new life.

You long to feel safe. You long to be protected and to know that no one can ever hurt you again.

Prayer

O God, I am afraid to close my eyes at night. I am afraid to open my eyes in the morning. I am so afraid. Is it really over? Will I ever be able to let go and relax? Sometimes I am so jumpy. My fear even paralyzes me. I am

unable to try new things for fear that I will fail or that I will only humiliate myself. I do not want to be yelled at or laughed at. It would be too painful. I wish I could hide.

God, you have promised to be with me. You have the power to protect me. Set me free of this constant fear that inhibits me from living. Help me to come to terms with what is real fear and what I have conjured up in my head. May I gain a sense of your presence with me so that my fears will not consume me. Give me peace. Amen

Courage

Scripture

The Lord is the everlasting God,
 the creator of the ends of the earth.
 [God] does not faint or grow weary;
 [God's] understanding is unsearchable.
 [God] gives power to the faint,
 and strengthens the powerless.
 Even youths will faint and be weary,
 and the young will fall exhausted;
 but those who wait for the Lord
 shall renew their strength,
 they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
 they shall run and not be weary,
 they shall walk and not faint.

Isa. 40:28b-31

Comment

It takes courage to go on from day to day. Sometimes the memories are so overpowering that they seem to swallow you up. At times it can feel like your body is in a raging river and you are barely hanging on to a wet slippery rock.

You are exhausted from hanging there so long that you just want to let go. Who would care anyway. The pain would stop.

It takes courage to really look at yourself in the mirror and not become disgusted with what you see. It takes courage to embrace and reclaim your body which had once been used by another for such painful and humiliating acts.

It takes courage to risk any part of yourself in relationships, or in advancing in your career, or in making decisions, or in letting go of guarding your secret, or in choosing to be happy or in caring for yourself....The list goes on and on.

But having courage to live is one powerful way of ending the violence done to you. It is one powerful way of defeating the perpetrator. It is one powerful way of giving courage to other victims and survivors.

Prayer

Oh God, I am weary from trying to hang on and I wonder at times why I should. At times I feel okay even good, but at other times I feel embarrassed and ashamed for what happened to me. There are times when I am convinced that when others look at me, they can see that I am disgusting.

There are times when I have to make a decision and am overcome with fear. I don't want to humiliate myself by making a wrong decision. I fear that someone will scold me and tell me I am nothing.

What happens God if I take the next step and fall forever into a black hole? Oh God help me. Give me the courage to move ahead and stop looking over my shoulder all the time. Lift me up on your wings so that nothing can touch me again. Make me strong so that I can go on. Give me the determination that no matter what, I will not be defeated for you are there to steady my feet and hold me up! Amen

Healing

Scripture

"I will [praise] you, O Lord, for you
have drawn me up, and did not let my foes
rejoice over me.
O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
O Lord, you brought up my soul from [hell],
restored me to life from among those
gone down to the Pit.

Ps. 30:1-3

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know [Christ] no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Cor. 5:16, 17

Comment

You have endured so much. You have lived with the scars of the abuse. There are times when you have hated your body for all you see is ugliness when you look into the mirror. You jump when someone comes too close or touches you in places that cause you to remember the horror. You are tired

of feeling and reacting this way. When will it ever end?
Will it ever end?

You long to be normal. You long to have the memories go away. You long to be happy more times than not, yet the dark cloud keeps returning.

The power of the memories will come to an end. You will be able to reclaim your body. You will reclaim yourself. Your spirit will breathe fresh air. Scripture says that in Christ we are a new creation and that the old will pass away.

It is a new creation not a repaired creation, or a patched-up-to-make-due creation, but a new creation. The ideal of healing in scripture means wholeness or completeness. For God, nothing in one's past wins out. God is always looking to the future of what can be and invites you to accept the possibilities that God is offering you. God will heal!

Prayer

God, I feel broken, old and ugly. There is excruciating pain deep in my heart that causes me to wonder if I can ever be whole again. My bones cry out from the crushing weight of my past that at times seems to be destroying my present life.

I have had enough God. I want to experience your healing power as energy flowing through my veins. I do not want to be crushed any longer. Help me God now. Put me back on my

feet and help me walk so that I am no longer limping through life. May I know what it means to be a new creation. Amen

Weariness

Scripture

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer.
 From the end of the earth I call to you,
 when my heart is faint.
 Lead me to the rock that is higher than I;
 for you are my refuge, a strong tower
 against the enemy.
 Let me abide in your tent forever,
 find refuge under the shelter of your wings.
 Ps. 61:1-4

Save me, O God,
 for the waters have come up to my neck.
 I sink in deep mire,
 where there is no foothold;
 I have come into deep waters,
 and the flood sweeps over me.
 I am weary with my crying;
 my throat is parched.
 My eyes grow dim
 with waiting for my God.

 But as for me, my prayer is to
 you, O Lord.
 At an acceptable time, O God,
 in the abundance of your
 steadfast love, answer me
 With your faithful help rescue me
 from sinking in the mire;
 let me be delivered from my enemies
 and from the deep waters.
 Ps. 69:1-3, 13, 14

Comment

There are times when you have energy to keep moving toward recovery. Then there are times when you do not think you can go on. It takes so much effort. You have been working at it so long. You are tired of the mess. You are

tired of making progress and then have a memory, smell, touch or word seem to undo everything. You are tired of being afraid. You are tired of second guessing yourself. You are tired of worrying about whether you will make it. You are just tired almost to the point of not caring about anything or anyone. You wonder how much longer till you can be free. You worry that you never will be free and you feel angry. You feel like ending it all.

God is ready to give you rest when you are tired. God will provide the shelter you need to regroup. God will provide the strength and energy to go on when you do not think you can.

Prayer

God, I am tired and cannot go on. There is an ache within me from trying to hang on that is unbearable to endure any longer. I am not sure I want to go on. I feel so discouraged. Will it ever end? Will I ever find peace from the past? Will I ever be able to make a move without the burden of the past?

Help God! I do not think I can take another step. I need you to walk for me. Do not let me fall. I need to find some rest. Give me your rest. Help me to hold up my head. Move me past the feeling that I am barely hanging on. Strengthen my mind and my body so that I can see a new day

ahead. May your spirit flow over me in a way that finally allows me to relax and to trust you. Amen

Hope

Scripture

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

Ps. 27:1

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

John 14:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more....And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

Rev. 21:1, 5a

Comment

The past cannot destroy you unless you let it. What happened in the past does not have to be the end. The past does not have to control the present and the future. God offers possibilities for a new life. God offers freedom from the past. The perpetrator was once so powerful, but not anymore! Now you have the power to make things happen. God is never defeated and will not allow you to be defeated. You have the power to change the course of your life. God who is full of love and compassion for you will resource you for

that new course. God has intended a special place for you and no one can take that away from you. God has remembered you and loved you.

Prayer

God, There is hope through you. You do not hold me to my past, but call me to a future with you. You tell me you have a special place for me.

Yet God there are times when I feel that there is no hope. The nightmare seems to go on and on. The past constantly interferes with my present so much so that I cannot even image a future. My inability to not be controlled by my past makes me want to give up. What is the use?

God, break into my life with your light of hope. Make it swell up within me till I am entirely full of your light so that I can see through the darkness of my past and into the future. Don't let me turn back now, but move toward the future you see for me. Amen

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